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Date 8 August 1990

ABC'S NIGHTLINE
Aired Aug. 7, 1990
Guests: CIA Director William Webster
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The editor of the report is Robert Doherty. Steve Ginsburg, Tim Ahmann, Peter Ramjug and Paul Schomer also are available to help you. If you have questions, please call 898-8345. For service problems, call 1-800-8-REUTER.

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TED KOPPEL: Under the category of it's always better to be lucky than smart, I should note that this interview with the director of Central Intelligence has been planned for some time, long before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. It's probably fair to say that there are a lot of things Judge Webster would rather be doing in the middle of an international crisis than being the object of a live television interview, but he made a commitment and he has kept it. Our original topic was to be the future of intelligence gathering in the 1990s. Perhaps an appropriate way of bridging that topic with the current crisis in the Persian Gulf is by noting that in terms of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the future is now.

A couple of pieces of information that have come to us quite literally in the last few minutes, Judge Webster, one of them that the president is going to be giving a live briefing on television tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock, and the other coming from my colleague, Bob Zelnick, over at the Pentagon, who quotes sources over there as saying that there is strong evidence that the Iraqis are now massing along the border with Saudi Arabia and that there is some fear that they may launch an invasion even before U.S. troops get there. I realize you're going to be constrained from how much you can say, but what can you tell us on that?

WEBSTER: Well, I appreciate that you understand my position, and your reporting about what sources are saying. I think it's important that in this type of situation we let the president speak for his government, our government. I don't think it's appropriate for me to be discussing the fast-breaking events that are taking place.

But I do think that this situation that we find that

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part of the world in and ourselves involved, for our own national security interests and that of our friends, suggests the kind of world that we're going to be looking at in the 1990s and the kind of regional conflicts that are going to occupy the attention of the intelligence community in the future.

KOPPEL: You're making that transition into the future a little more quickly than I hoped you would, Judge Webster, so let me see if I can drag you kicking and screaming into the past just a little bit--the very recent past. How satisfied are you with the job that the intelligence community did in giving this government fair warning that what has happened, at least insofar as the invasion into Kuwait is concerned, would happen?

WEBSTER: I'm pleased with the way the process has taken place, the way the intelligence has been marshalled and analyzed and presented to our president and to the policymakers of our country, and the way in which they have utilized it and responded to it in making important decisions in the interests of our country. In a way, if I could outline it for you--and I can't--it would be very typical of the kind of process that I think represents the future of intelligence, and its integration with policymaking.

KOPPEL: You heard Jackie Judd talking about that breakdown, and I don't know how accurate that is--but the budgetary breakdown, 90 percent on technical means, 10 percent on human. Your critics, critics even of the CIA's performance, the intelligence community's performance, these last few days, are saying you guys were terrific in terms of letting the president know that there were 100,000 troops massed along the border, but when it came to being able to predict with any degree of accuracy whether an invasion was going to take place and, even more to the point, when it was going to take place, you were nowhere.

WEBSTER: That's not correct. I can't go into the details about it, except to say that we've had some very nice compliments from military leaders and others who were getting the information, and I think in time we'll be able to discuss that. If we want to talk about some of the problems of intelligence, separate and apart from this particular incident, I think there will always be difficulties in establishing the exact moment in time when something is going to occur, especially if it involves someone's decision-making process, and we're not inside their brain. But the indicators--it's important to have the indicators, important to suggest what those indicators are, and important to make recommendations about what we think is likely to happen. And all of those things were done.

KOPPEL: I guess what I was getting at is to what degree do you think the intelligence community has come to rely too much on the bells and whistles, the gadgets, the computers, the radar intercepts, rather than what is always more difficult--human intelligence?

WEBSTER: I think we made a major effort to build the human collection capability. It's been the top of my priority list; it's been my view we can never really know the intentions and capabilities of adversaries without human intelligence. But the national technical collection provides us with a superior way of--not superior to human intelligence, but an excellent to tell of changes that are taking place, helps us in counting military equipment, armament, changes in military strategy, identifies the nature of explosions, earthquakes, fires in chemical plants--a whole range of capabilities--in very short time. CNN could be there for certain kinds of things--and it serves its purpose, you serve your purpose because you bring an analytical quality to it. But I think that this is an important ingredient that consumers of intelligence depend heavily upon.

But the human intelligence factor is one that we place a high priority on here, and with the changes taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union especially, where we need to be closer to the political dynamics, it's very important that we have people who can understand and collect information valuable to us in our analytical work.

KOPPEL: I want to get into the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in just a moment, but before we take a break, Judge Webster, what can you tell us--give us a little thumbnail profile, hopefully one that transcends what we've seen in the newspapers and heard on television, of Saddam Hussein. What is it we need to know about this man?

WEBSTER: Well, again, I'd be much more comfortable in talking about that subject a week away or two weeks away.

KOPPEL: But now is the time we all care.

WEBSTER: We certainly have focused heavily upon him, his past performance, his psychological profile--everything that we could collect about his health, his history, his treatment of his fellow Iraqis, his ruthlessness, the nature of his past practices in dealing with Iran.

KOPPEL: Do you consider him stable?

WEBSTER: Well, I consider that in his own way he knows what he's doing. It might not be what you and I would think was a rational thing to do, but he knows what he's doing. And I think--I could give you a psychological profile, but then I would be doing the thing I said I shouldn't be doing, and that's talking about this case.

KOPPEL: ABC's Diane Sawyer recently interviewed William Webster's Soviet counterpart, KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov. Kryuchkov charged that in spite of improved relations, the CIA has been stepping up its intelligence work.

KRYUCHKOV (through interpreter): We think that American intelligence has not lowered its activity in terms of its work on the Soviet Union. For example, only a couple of years ago I would have said ``against the Soviet Union,'' now I say ``on the Soviet Union.'' The CIA and its director, Webster, apparently consider that right now for them a good time has come to strengthen their operational activities inside the Soviet Union.

KOPPEL: I would think he's right on the money, wouldn't you? I mean, right now would be a good time. In the past 45 years, the CIA must have had an enormously difficult time operating on the ground in the Soviet Union. This would be a good time to step up operational activities.

WEBSTER: If we accept that our fundamental mission is to have an encyclopedic knowledge of those areas of the world that affect our national security and to have that information developed and ready when our policymakers need it, then I certainly agree with you. And that is sort of the spirit in which we are trying to understand a number of the changes in the Soviet Union, not only politically but militarily. We're engaged in a series of very serious arms control negotiations leading to treaties for a reduction in arms and enhancing the prospects of peace in the future. The key to that is confidence, confidence that the Soviets are doing what they say they will do, confidence of our ability through verification processes and monitoring to know that they are doing what they say they are going to do.

And my sense of it is that even President Gorbachev recognizes that our interest in what they are doing holds out a prospect for peace. As a matter of fact, at the state dinner for President Gorbachev, at one point he took me by both arms and looked me in the eye and said: Watch us very carefully, and ask a lot of questions. And he gave me a big smile and a pat on the back. And I said ``Count on it.''

KOPPEL: I'll bet. Now, one would assume that a bonanza for the intelligence, the U.S. intelligence, community right now is the way that Eastern Europe is sort of falling apart, the way that outfits like the Stasi in East Germany, the Securitate in Romania, are now becoming at least more accessible than they were, especially the East German secret police. That would, I would assume, give you enormous insight into what's been going on in many different parts of the world--and, if you'll forgive me for trying to bring it back for a moment now--even to places, or perhaps even especially places like Iraq, Libya.

WEBSTER: What you say is very true, and it's a unique window and you can bet we're taking advantage of it, not only in those things that are taking place, that did take place in Eastern Europe and our understanding of them, but also those unique relationships that occurred in Eastern Europe under communist domination and control with fingers into the terrorist world and other places.

KOPPEL: Is this an opportunity to totally undermine the sort of global terrorism that we have seen over the past couple of decades?

WEBSTER: Well, that's a pretty expansive hope. It will make important contributions in that effort, and we are sure putting on a full court press for it.

KOPPEL: Do you trust the people who, until just a year or so ago, were your bitterest enemies? I don't mean bitter enemy in a personal sense, but certainly in a professional sense. Do you trust them now when they come to you and say, well, we're so glad now that we can share information with you.

WEBSTER: Well, we've been going through the process of recruiting people from inside hostile intelligence services for years. We've been in the process of accepting defectors who want to come to this country and enjoy its freedoms, and who are willing to share their information. But we take it with the professional skepticism that you would expect us to have, and we verify the bona fides of those people. But there's no better way to get information, especially when it's supported by documentation that many of them have saved for a time such as right now.

KOPPEL: I want to take a break, Judge Webster, and when we come back I'd like you to give me a sort of a look into the future as to how you want to spend your assets, particularly if you have some important changes in mind. We'll be back with Judge Webster in just a moment.

KOPPEL: Judge Webster, let's see if we can close by bridging our gap again. Use what is happening now in the Persian Gulf as a means of explaining to me--use that as a case study, as a means of explaining to me, how you want to build the intelligence community of the future. What have you found lacking or what would you have done differently if you'd had more time? Let's say if this had happened five years from now?

WEBSTER: Well, I think that I am so pleased with the way in which intelligence has worked with policy-makers in this issue that I wouldn't say that I would look for something to do differently because we would like always to have a better understanding of what's taking place in complex parts of the world.

But there, as an example, of a regional area, of vital interest to us, Saudi Arabia, our friend, the Gulf itself with freedom of navigation, oil, having a tremendous economic influence not only on us but in other parts of the world. I could list a number of other national security interests that make our relationship with that part of the world vital and so regional things cannot be thought of as just somebody else's problem. We'll encounter the same things in Africa, potentially problems in the Philippines, areas in Latin America from time to time--we've already had them--

KOPPEL: Pakistan.

WEBSTER: Korea, North Korea and South Korea; Pakistan and India, that part of the world, a delicate situation, the future of Afghanistan, to mention those, and we've got to be on top of them. But aside from those, let's not forget we haven't left--the Soviet Union has not suddenly become kinder and gentler and all problems are over. Their troops are still in Europe. The strategic modernized nuclear capability is still there. We have to find ways to live with those changes even as we're focusing on new intelligence problems of the future. Sometimes we call them transnational problems.

KOPPEL: Judge Webster, I've going to interrupt you with some news. You've made it through the mine field, I think, without exploding anything. We're out of time. Thank you very much, sir; it was very gracious of you.